



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Illinois Conservation Police close yearlong turkey poaching investigation

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Conservation Police have concluded an extensive investigation into the poaching of more than 20 wild turkeys by out-of-state hunters in the Alton-Wood River area in Madison County.

Conservation police initiated an investigation in March 2022 after wild turkey carcasses were located. During the investigation, authorities identified individuals who had been poaching wild turkeys at night in or near the city limits of Hartford, Alton and Wood River. It was determined the men used AR-style rifles equipped with thermal imaging scopes and suppressors.

Seven people were arrested in connection with the investigation, and a total of 63 misdemeanor charges were filed against them. Individuals charged were Dustin Goldsmith of McCall Creek, Mississippi; Hunter Baxter of Lucedale, Mississippi; Nick Henley of Monticello, Arkansas; Benjamin Emerson of Lucedale, Mississippi; Dakota Jarratt of Wilmar, Arkansas; Matthew McClendon of Augusta, Georgia; and Jacob Russell of Ruth, Mississippi.

Additional felony charges were filed against Baxter and Goldsmith. Baxter has been charged with two felony counts in Madison County, including possession of a suppressed firearm and resource theft more than \$3,000. Goldsmith has been charged with a felony count of resource theft of more than \$3,000.

In addition to allegedly poaching more than 20 wild turkeys, police also alleged three cotton-tailed rabbits were poached from a vehicle with a suppressed rifle equipped with thermal imaging scopes in Calhoun County.

Court dates have been set in both Madison and Calhoun counties for all individuals involved. The defendants are presumed innocent unless proved guilty.

“Poaching is a serious crime that can cause tremendous harm to wildlife and biodiversity. Conservation laws are in place to ensure wildlife resources are around for future generations to enjoy,” **said Jed Whitchurch, director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Office of Law Enforcement.** “I encourage anyone who is aware of poaching crimes in Illinois to come forward with tips. People have a responsibility to understand these laws and to follow them.”

To report poaching and other illegal activity, complete the Target Illinois Poachers (TIP) incident reporting form at <https://bit.ly/IDNROLETIP> or call 877-2DNRLAW.

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